Radical Quakers?

In Gnostic faiths there is no dividing line between religious and other practical affairs; all that exists, exists in one Light. Some would call this a radical position, and it is just so: Radical derives from the Latin word radix, meaning "root." A radical viewpoint or strategy is one that addresses the root or fundamental aspects of a situation. Get those parts right, and everything else tends to fall in place.

The Religious Society of Friends takes a radical approach to religious faith and practice, continually returning to the source and seeking deeper roots in reality: We have discarded as much of the outward structure and process of religion as possible, while holding fast to the core concepts and methods that define religious experience and identity. When we are sure that God has told us to do something, we do it. When we have our doubts, we raise our questions and await positive answers - both as individuals and as groups.

Friends have been doing this for about 350 years. We keep doing it because we have not found anything that works better. Outwardly, the standard Quaker service presents as people sitting still in a quiet room for an hour, during which a few may stand and speak briefly, or not. Inwardly, the process begins with centering down,

that is, relaxing and dismissing thoughts and concerns until one's mind gets relatively quiet. Anyone familiar with basic meditation should find that part easy. What comes next? Lao Tzu may have said it best:

In the pursuit of learning one knows more every day;
In the pursuit of the way one does less every day.
One does less and less until one does nothing at all,
and when one does nothing at all there is nothing that is undone.

It is always through not meddling that the empire is won.
Should you meddle, then you are not equal to the task of winning the empire.

- Tao Te Ching, D.C. Lau translation

When a critical mass of those present in Meeting for Worship achieve some degree of success in centering down, all experience a tangible change. Something switches on, and pulls in those who are not quite there yet. This phenomenon is called a "gathered Meeting."

What comes next? We let what happens happen. Maybe some will experience changes in attitudes and perceptions going forward. Maybe the group will get a message directing them to take specific actions. On a few occasions Friends have changed the world somewhat: Not because we are terribly good or clever, but because the momentum of our process sometimes leaves us no other choice than to do as we are told.

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